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Transcript of President Ford's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Affairs

Following is the transcript of President Ford's news conference in Washington last night, as recorded by The New York Times through the facilities of ABC news.

OPENING STATEMENT

For over a year, the nation has engaged in exhaustive investigations into the activity of the CIA and other intelligence units of our Government. Facts, hearsay and closely held secrets—all have been spread out on the public record.

We have learned many lessons from this experience, but we must not become obsessed with the deeds of the past. We must act for the future. Tonight, I am announcing plans for the first major reorganization of the intelligence community since 1947.

First, I am establishing by executive order a new command structure for foreign intelligence. Henceforth, overall policy directions for intelligence will rest in only one place: the National Security Council, consisting of the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense. Management of intelligence will be conducted by a single new committee. That committee will be chaired by the Director of Central Intelligence, George Bush.

To monitor the performance of our intelligence operations, I am creating a new independent oversight board to be made up of private citizens. Former Ambassador Robert D. Murphy will chair the board and two other distinguished citizens—Stephen Ailes and Leo Thorne—will serve as members. All three of these units—the National Security Council, the committee on foreign intelligence and the oversight board—will be responsible to me, so that the President will continue to be ultimately accountable for our intelligence activities.

Second, to improve the performance of the intelligence agencies and to restore public confidence in them, I am issuing a comprehensive set of public guidelines which will serve as legally binding charters for our intelligence agencies. The charters will provide stringent protections for the rights of American citizens. I will soon meet with Congressional leaders to map out legislation to provide judicial safeguards against electronic surveillance and mail openings. I will also support legislation that would prohibit attempts on the lives of foreign leaders.

Third, tomorrow I will send to the Congress special legislation to safeguard critical intelligence secrets. This legislation would make it a crime for a Government employee who has access to certain highly classified information to reveal that information improperly.

In taking these actions, I have been guided by two imperatives.

As Americans, we must not and will not tolerate actions by our Government which abridge the rights of our citizens. At the same time, we must maintain a strong and effective intelligence capability in the United States. I will not be a party to the dismantling of the CIA and the other intelligence agencies.

To be effective, our foreign policy must be based upon a clear understanding of the international environment. To operate without adequate and timely intelligence information will cripple our security in a world that is still hostile to our freedoms.

Nor can we confine our intelligence to the question of whether there will be an imminent military attack. We also need information about the world's economy, about political and social trends, about food supply and population growth, and certainly about terrorism.

To protect our security diplomatically, militarily and economically, we must have a comprehensive intelligence capability.

The United States is a peace-loving nation, and our foreign policy is designed to lessen the threat of war and of aggression. In recent years, we have made substantial progress toward that goal—in the Middle East, in Europe, in Asia and elsewhere around the world. Yet we also recognize that the best way to secure the peace is to be fully prepared to defend our interests. I believe in peace through strength.

A central pillar of our strength is, of course, our armed forces. But another great pillar must be our intelligence community—the dedicated men and women who gather vital information around the world and carry our missions that advance our interests in the world.

The overriding task now is to rebuild the confidence and capability of our intelligence services so that we can live securely in peace and freedom. That is my goal.

QUESTIONS

Intelligence Director

Q. Mr. President. You have talked often lately including tonight about the need for a strong intelligence capability. You have appointed a Director of Central Intelligence who has little or no intelligence expertise that I'm aware of, and I wondered what do you see as the advantages of having a relative novice directing the intelligence community?

A. I respectfully disagree with your assessment of George Bush's capabilities and background. George Bush was our U.N. ambassador and did a superb job at the United Nations. George Bush was our representative in the People's Republic of China and in that capacity did extremely well. I've known George Bush for a number of years; I served with him in the House of Representatives where he did a very fine job. I'm absolutely convinced he will perform superbly as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

Q. Are you arguing that he has an intelligence background? A. I think he has the intelligence to do the job and the experience in foreign policy, and I think these are major ingredients that make him an outstanding person for this responsibility.

Nixon's Trip to China

Q. Mr. President, Robert Strauss has suggested that it might behoove you to ask former President Nixon to postpone or cancel his trip to China. There are also reports that you're unhappy because it coincides with the New Hampshire primary. Do you have any plans to ask him to put off the trip?

A. I have no such plans. Mr. Nixon is going to the People's Republic of China as a private citizen at the invitation of that Government. I don't believe a private American citizen visits that country. I should intervene with the invitation of a foreign government to have a private citizen visit.

Q. Well, do you think if the Chinese Government sends a special plane which lands at a military airport, asks for the top media in this country to cover him—some 20 representatives—and you send your special briefing books on the change in leadership and it still is a private trip in their eyes?

A. Well, let me answer several of those questions; you've asked a good many of them.

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